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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000002

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: KIDNAPPING UPDATE: SECURITY FORCES DEPLOY, ROYG  
INCREASES PRESSURE

REF: SANAA 3614

Classified By: AMBASSADOR THOMAS C. KRAJESKI, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Tribesmen continue to hold five Italian tourists hostage in the Sirwah mountains, 60 miles northeast of Sanaa. On January 2, the ROYG deployed 33 members of the Ministry of the Interior's Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) to an area near where the hostages are believed to be held. The kidnappers threatened to kill the hostages if the security forces attempted a rescue. The Italian Ambassador reportedly blocked an attempted rescue by the CTU, for fear the kidnappers would make good on their threat. The ROYG continued to take a tough public stance, saying it will not negotiate with the tribe and will use "all kinds of pressure" to secure the Italians' release. Deploying extra security and publicly refusing to negotiate indicates the ROYG is taking a firmer hand against hostage-taking, but risks stoking the ire of a powerful tribal group with past links to terrorist elements (reftel). End Summary.

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Security Forces Deploy  
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12. (C) On January 2, the CTU was deployed to an area near where the Italians are believed to be held since being kidnapped January 1 by members of the Jahm tribe in Marib province. The tribe is demanding the release of eight imprisoned members being held in relation to a feud with a rival tribe. The kidnappers threatened to kill the hostages if security forces stormed the compound. The Italian Ambassador reportedly vetoed a rescue attempt, fearing for the hostages' safety. No rescue attempt appears imminent, but the CTU is reportedly preparing to use force against the kidnappers once the Italians are released (septel).  
(Comment: While the CTU, thanks largely to USG assistance through the Foreign Military Financing program, is Yemen's most capable security force, its hostage rescue skills are limited, to non-existent. End Comment).

13. (C) As security forces deployed, the ROYG continued to issue tough public statements against the kidnappers. Prime Minister Abdel Kader Bajammal said the government "will not negotiate with the hostage-takers" nor be lenient with those involved. This tough public stance, along with the CTU's deployment, indicates the ROYG is taking a much harder line compared with the three previous kidnappings of foreigners within the last six weeks. In those cases, the ROYG negotiated quietly with the kidnappers and made few public statements.

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The Kidnappers: Who are They?  
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14. (C) The kidnappers are members of the Zaidi clan of the Jahm tribe who hail from the oil rich Marib province to the east of Sanaa (Note: The Zaidi tribal group should not be confused with the Zaidi Shi'a sect of northern Yemen). The tribe has a history of kidnapping foreigners to win concessions from the government, including financial payouts and the release of prisoners. In 2001, members of the Jahm tribe kidnapped then German Commercial Attach Rainer Berns, reportedly demanding a million-dollar ransom and the release of suspects being held for the 2000 USS Cole bombing. Two brothers involved in the kidnapping, Ahmed Ali Al-Zaidi and Mohammed Ali Ali Al-Zaidi were members of Yemeni Islamic Jihad, an Al-Qaeda associated terrorist group started by Yemenis who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

15. (C) The Zaidi clan also belongs to a much larger tribal grouping known as the Khawlan al-Teyyal, who comprise around 140,000 members living in the Sirwah region straddling Sanaa and Marib provinces. Many tribal groups within this region, where government control is weak, have also used kidnapping as a tool to pressure the central government into providing additional resources or releasing imprisoned members. Members of the Abidah group within the same region were reportedly involved in the recent kidnappings of Austrian and Swiss tourists. The ROYG has also accused Abidah tribal members of granting safehaven to terrorist suspects. In 2001, fighting broke out between security forces and tribesmen, after the Yemeni Republican Guard attempted to

arrest suspected Al-Qaeda member Abu Ali al-Harethi who had been granted safehaven by some tribal members.

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Comment  
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16. (C) The ROYG appears to have realized its policy of giving into tribal demands and not pursuing those involved has encouraged other tribal groups to seek redress of their own grievances by kidnapping foreigners. While the ROYG's claims of not negotiating with the kidnappers is likely false, the potential use of force is clearly figuring into any rescue or post-release plan. A violent ending to a Yemeni kidnapping incident would be unusual, as hostages are generally released unharmed. If the ROYG decides, however, to take a tougher stand with the Italians' kidnappers, any rescue attempt would likely put the hostages in danger. On the other hand, if a peaceful settlement is reached, the CTU appears ready to use force against the kidnappers. While the use of force may deter other tribes from continuing the recent spate of kidnappings, it would likely increase regional tribal animosity toward the central government. The ROYG can ill-afford provoking another disgruntled tribal group, as it continues low-level fighting against the Al-Houthi insurgency in northwestern Yemen.

Krajeski